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United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Region 5
77 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, Illinois 60604

Michigan, Minnesota,
Ohio, Wisconsin



Environmental NEWS RELEASE



Legal Contact: Tom Krueger
(312) 886-0562

Media Contact: Mick Hans
(312) 353-5050

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EPA ORDERS NICOR, INC., TO DEVELOP CLEANUP PLAN FOR CHICAGO HEIGHTS SCRAP YARD; ESTABLISHES PROTOCOLS FOR OTHER POTENTIAL MERCURY SITES

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 5 on Wednesday issued a Unilateral Administrative Order to Nicor, Inc., requiring the company to develop and implement a formal work plan and procedures for the continuing investigation and subsequent cleanup of mercury contamination at the Chicago Heights Iron and Supply facility, Chicago Heights.

A joint EPA and Illinois EPA investigation of the scrap yard, at 1715 Wentworth, began September 2, following confirmation that Nicor had sent out-of-service regulators containing mercury to the facility.

The Chicago Heights scrap yard is the first non-residential site identified as having residual contamination from mercury-containing regulators that Nicor had removed from service. EPA and Illinois EPA are currently inspecting approximately 40 Nicor facilities and 25 scrap yards for possible contamination. The inspections are expected to continue through early next week.

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“With this order, Nicor must establish formal procedures—subject to EPA review and approval—for the cleanup and off-site disposal of mercury at any industrial facilities identified during this evolving situation. And, Nicor must follow those procedures when it begins cleanup of the Chicago Heights facility,” said Regional Administrator Francis X. Lyons.

The EPA order builds upon the Illinois Attorney General and Cook and DuPage County prosecutors’ September 5 lawsuit requiring Nicor and two contractors to proceed with a swift and effective cleanup at residential and industrial sites throughout northern Illinois. Significantly, under EPA’s order, if Nicor does not perform the cleanup, EPA’s Superfund program has full legal authority to move forward with a cleanup of the Chicago Heights scrap yard, and then pursue Nicor for clean-up costs.

In contrast with the Chicago Heights scrap yard cleanup (which requires both Illinois EPA and EPA approval to proceed), Nicor’s work at residential sites is continuing, without interruption, under Illinois EPA and EPA supervision, and in consultation with other members of the intergovernmental task force recently organized to address the situation.

EPA expects to receive the Nicor work plan for the Chicago Heights site by early next week.

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